Scale of Lavalas victory questioned

The May 21st elections returned a huge victory for Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s new, populist, Lavalas Family party. According to the official results, the Lavalas Family won 18 out of 19 Senate seats (the other went to an independent), 26 out of 83 seats for the House of Deputies, 80 of the 115 town mayoralities, and 321 of 485 rural and town councils.

Voters turned out in force – over 60% of those registered – to once again show their faith in Aristide. His party’s victory owed much to the mobilising efforts of young Lavalas Family activists across the country, but also to the fact that, in contrast to the other parties contesting the election, it actually had a coherent political campaign. While the Lavalas Family promised better education, support for agricultural production, and improved security, its opponents – ranging from the U.S.-favoured social democrat coalition (Espace de Concertation), to the fundamentalist Protestants’ party (Mochrena) and the Duvalier supporters’ group (MPSN) – offered voters little more than their virulent hatred of Aristide.

Both international and local observers gave the elections a clean bill of health, save for some minor irregularities on the day, and some chaotic scenes at numerous vote-counting offices in the days that followed. However, as the magnitude of their defeat became apparent, the losing parties seized on a number of incidents of fraud and intimidation, and the arrests by police of around a dozen of their candidates. They claimed this was evidence of a Lavalas Family conspiracy to establish a totalitarian, one-party state. Almost imme-

"Lavalas Family opponents offered voters little more than their virulent hatred of Aristide"
Haiti's voters confirmed all his connections by transparently voting for the May 21st general elections. As in the case in 1990, analysts who predicted a low turnout were left with egg on their faces as nearly two-thirds of the four million registered voters cast their votes. And, just ten years ago, it was the populace of Jean-Bertrand Aristide was one of the main reasons for the voters' enthusiasm.

Despite the 1991-94 military coup, the lama-flamme final year of his Presidency, and four years of the time of the limelight, it seems that a good number of Haitians still believe Aristide, and in the Lavalas movement for political change with which he is strongly associated. The Aristide effect' contributed massively to the Lavalas Family victory, but there were other reasons too. Clearly, Aristide and his party had successfully established an organizational structure, and a network of support across the country.

The opposition parties

The votes for the Lavalas Family can also be seen as a rejection of the opposition parties, which had done little to win the confidence of the electorate. Despite Aristide, the electoral defeat the Struggling People's Organisation (OPL) in spectacular fashion.

The OPL had been the main winner in the last general elections. In 1995, and as a result, had enjoyed a majority in the Parliament, and led the government in the 1996-97 period. For this reason, most of its former supporters negatively associated with the political crisis that they had faced in the period of Aristide's government. Two years after the year, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, when speaking to the editor of Haiti Briefing, confirmed that there were many bad elements, such as criminals, a few drug dealers, and even Duvaliers. They had embarked on the attacks of the Lavalas Family Party. Aristide said he was not unduly worried because he had no doubt that the police and the army, who were leaders of the 1991 coup, and so avoid a runoff, and it does underscore the many tens of thousands of votes that the two populist parties. On the other hand, this method is in keeping with the spirit of the law, if not the letter, and does ideally an ask a right winner unless there are equal or nearly equal points. As for the OAS method, it infuses the importance of the minor party votes, making it difficult for a candidate to win outright in the first round. However, there are serious problems when, in the May 2nd elections, there were no seats up for election in each of the departments (and three in the Central Plateau). The question, the electoral law, does not address, is how to calculate the results when dealing with such by-elections?

The President-elect (CPE) did not use the method used in 1990 and 1995, when there were no seats to fill. In fact, in both the triple Senate elections, and only as a result of the by-elections. Some weeks after the elections, votes were still being counted, the Organisation of American States General Assembly, and the OAS General Assembly and was looking at the vote calculations in the CEP, the OAS, in Haiti, in 2000 election.

One notebale feature of the election was the number of former Haitian armed forces members standing for the Lavalas Family. According to the CEP's official results, there were all sorts of candidates, from the armed forces, to the supporters of the Aristide Party, to the candidates of the opposition parties. Among them, the opposition parties' leader, and the leader of the Lavalas Family, had polled the highest vote. The, and the Lavalas Family, could really be a party that represents the rural and urban poor. Patrick Elie, Minister of the Interior under Aristide in 1991, told Haiti Briefing that he would be able to work with all the parties and would eventually lead the government of the new coalition government. Patrick Elie will be the leader of new Lavalas Family party, and is expected to lead the government of the new coalition government.
Haiti's World Cup dream is over

An exciting few months for Haitian soccer brought the national team close to qualifying for the 2002 World Cup finals. In February, the red and blues gained valuable experience when they qualified for the Gold Cup tournament staged in Miami, Florida. The three-team competition pitted them against Peru and the United States. They lost 0-3 to the U.S., but achieved a creditable 1-1 draw against Peru.

The Caribbean zone World Cup qualifying competition got off to a good start when Haiti beat Dominica 4-0 at home, and then 3-1 away. The next round, in April, was another two-legged affair, this time against the Bahamas. The first leg played in Port-au-Prince's Sylvio Cator stadium saw Haiti thrash the Bahamas 9-0. The return game was another goal feast – Haiti coming out 4-0 victors.

Having negotiated the minnows, Haiti then had to face more serious opposition in the form of Trinidad and Tobago, traditionally one of the strongest Caribbean soccer nations. The first away leg ended in a 1-3 defeat. At home, the Haitian team was unable to turn it around, and could only manage a 1-1 draw. In both matches, Manchester United's star striker, Dwight Yorke scored for Trinidad.

Defeat by Trinidad left Haiti with one last chance to make it to the final qualifying stages. In June, they had two games against Honduras, runners-up from the Central American qualifying group. Sadly, Haiti's form deserted them, and the team went down 4-0 in the first leg in Tegucigalpa. The tie was effectively over, and the return match was another poor performance ending in a 1-3 defeat.

The campaign to qualify for 2002 had failed, but, on the positive side, the team had grown in stature under new coach, Mamo Sanon, the hero of 1974, and had uncovered a new star, the midfielder, Sebastien Vorce, who in April signed for U.S. soccer league team, Los Angeles Galaxy.

EDINBURGH STAGE SET FOR RAM

Vodou Rock from Haiti

RAM, the 12-piece Haitian band who mix rock and traditional Vodou rhythms, are playing at this year's Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

RAM is led by Richard Morse, who runs the legendary Hotel Olofsson in downtown Port-au-Prince. He grew up in the New York area, the son of a U.S academic and a Haitian folk singer and dancer, and, when he arrived in Haiti in 1987, the roots (rasis) music scene was already a few years old. His leaders were middle class Haitian kids, fed up with the inane and profane compas, a merengue-type Haitian pop. Inspired by Bob Marley, reggae, and Rastafarianism in neighbouring Jamaica, they had

got into Vodou, and especially into Vodou drumming, based on rhythms more or less unchanged in the hundreds of years since West African slaves had been brought to the then French colony.

On this percussive base, rasis groups such as Foula, Boukan Ginen, and Boukman Eksperyans, laid Hendrix and Santana style guitar, and lyrics that both criticised the country's military dictatorships, and praised Haitian peasant culture and beliefs. Morse, with his pun sensibility, added thrashed chords and increasingly cynical lyrics about Haitian politics.

For all his outside influences and worldly concerns, Morse constantly refers to the importance of Haiti's much maligned and misunderstood Vodou religion. He told Haiti Briefing, "Haitian music is and has always been about the Vodou. I find its inspiration endless. Everything from rhythms, to melodies, to messages. Most foreigners can't get beyond the Bond film, "Live and Let Die" representations of Vodou, and nervously joke about putting pins in dolls, but for artists in Haiti it is, as Morse says, a rich source of imagery, colour, movement and rhythm.

RAM's new album, their third, provisionally entitled "Songs from the Last Testament", will, Morse says, be "more extreme. It's more Vodou and more rock. You feel the essence of each genre without feeling compromised."